



KEYS TO EFFECTIVE HEALTH PROMOTION



Key #14: Tools for Achieving Health Behavior Change

Changing health-related behaviors is a difficult challenge. Incorporate the tools below into your health promotion initiatives to assist participants in successfully changing health behaviors.

Tool #1: Set effective goals

- ➔ Focus on areas that can impact the overall goal.
 - For example, if the overall goal is to lose weight, the most productive areas to focus on are the dietary and activity changes that will lead to long-term weight loss.
 - For example, stress management and improving self-esteem may also impact weight loss; however, improving relationships, while a worthwhile topic, will not necessarily impact weight loss.
- ➔ Make the goals specific, attainable, and forgiving. For example:
 - "Exercise more" is too general.
 - "Walk five miles everyday" is specific, but may not be attainable.
 - "Walk 30 minutes everyday" is specific and more attainable, but is not very flexible.
 - "Walk 30 minutes, five days a week" is specific, attainable, and forgiving.
- ➔ Use a series of short-term goals to achieve the ultimate goal.
 - Short-term goals break big challenges into more easily attained pieces.
 - Smaller steps also provide program participants with encouragement and success. These small successes are essential for maintaining motivation towards a long-term goal.

Tool #2: Increase self-awareness

- Self-monitoring is useful for tracking behavioral and environmental cues that trigger a particular health behavior.
- Keeping track of health behavior status is also useful for times when progress towards a goal is difficult to measure, or when an individual is in a maintenance stage.

Tool #3: Provide rewards and motivation

- Encourage participants to reward themselves for achieving small successes on the way to their ultimate goal.
- Remember that rewards don't always have to be "things." Words of encouragement and praise can provide powerful motivation when spoken by a teacher, instructor, parent, friend, etc.

Tool #4: Respond effectively to set-backs

- Health behavior change is conceptually a continuum. However, movement along that continuum is not just in one direction. People can move backwards or forwards or sometimes just stay put. Communicate to participants that set-backs, lapses and even staying the same (i.e., maintenance) are common for individuals trying to change behavior.
- Stress is often a factor in lapses and relapses. Provide a variety of stress management resources to help participants better handle the stress which could trigger a set-back.
- Brain storm to create a list of potential (and probable) barriers to participant behavior change. Then formulate strategies to meet each of those challenges.
- Improved time management and decision-making skills can be effective ways to overcome behavior change relapses.
- Provide participants with information regarding the behavior change process so that they will be better prepared for the challenges they will face. A brief overview of the Stages of Change may be helpful.

*To access the complete set of Keys to Effective Health Promotion, go to: <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Population/HPPI.aspx>.
For questions about the HPPI Program contact us at: hppl_program_info@amedd.army.mil.*